

JSMF Public Radio News

Radio for People Who Listen

A Publication of the Jack Straw Foundation

November 1990

JACK STRAW PRODUCTIONS CELEBRATES OPENING

On November 2nd an open house will be held to celebrate the audio production and training center of Jack Straw Productions (JSP) at 4261 Roosevelt Way Northeast.

The Foundation purchased the Warren Office Building in October of last year to house its corporate offices and production center. Jack Straw Production's mission is to enable staff and private producers to make creative and innovative programming for broadcast on public radio in the Northwest and across the nation. In addition studios, staff and equipment will be available to individuals and businesses for audio recording.

The JSP center includes recording studios that can accommodate drama and small musical groups or soloists. The facilities have been designed by well-known architects and acoustical engineers to serve a variety of functions. Equipment and layout are largely modular, and can be arranged to suit many needs. The acoustics provide adjustable reverberation and good sound diffusion.

Studio One, a large room measuring 13 feet high, 23 feet wide and 26 feet long, is able to capture live performances of all genres of music. Its warmth makes it ideal for live two-track recordings. In addition, Control Room One has a 16-track Harrison mixer to produce master tapes for commercial release, demos and radio. Flexibility will be the key to this

room's success.

Studio Two, also 13 feet high, is 11 feet wide and 15 feet long. This room is excellent for voice recording and large enough to handle panel discussions. Control Room Two features Otari equipment, with one four-track and three two-track recorders. The console is an 18-channel JBL/Seck mixer. CD and cassette machines are also available.

We were very fortunate to have McKinley Architects; Towne, Richards and Chaudier sound consultants; Greenbush mechanical en-

gineers; Lease Crutcher Lewis contractors; and McDonald Miller, heating, ventilation and air conditioning, as the team that provided outstanding services in planning and building our production facility. Final wiring and equipment installation has been done by Octagon.

Charles Hamilton, Production Manager, plans to be in Seattle for the open house festivities. Hamilton will complete his Ph.D. in Communications at the University of Maryland and join the Foundation staff in early December.

KSER Volunteers To Begin Training

On a rainy night in mid-October, 48 people turned out for the first KSER Volunteer Orientation meeting at the Serene Lake School.

"As always," says station manager Nancy Keith, "we had people we expected and a very interesting group of volunteers we'd never heard from before." They were given an overview of KSER's program mission, volunteer roles and training plans by Keith, Music Director Stu Witmer and Public Affairs Director Ed Bremer. After the meeting, they toured the studios-in-progress at KSER's north Lynnwood location.

Training dates have been set for all volunteers wishing to do on-air work

at KSER. The training sessions will be held Saturday mornings from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m., on November 3rd, 10th, and 17th, and on December 1st. Alternate weeknight sessions may be offered. The sessions will be supplemented with a 30-page Volunteer Manual and special small group training and practice sessions with the control room and production room equipment.

Volunteers interested in on-air work at KSER must reserve a place in the program to complete their required training. Training reservations may be made by calling KSER at 742-4541.

JSP Programs of New Performance Group Concerts to Air

"Sinister Resonance", a new five-part radio series produced by Joan Rabinowitz for Jack Straw Productions, highlights music of the twentieth century performed in concert by Seattle's New Performance Group, a local ensemble specializing in contemporary classical music. The series will be broadcast on KBCS (91.3 FM) for five consecutive Mondays, beginning November 19th at 9:30 p.m.

"I sat at home late one night listening to a recording of the New Performance Group playing Takemitsu's 'Rainspell'," explained Rabinowitz. "It was a quiet evening. The music is very subtle, and I found myself listening to the piece in a way that felt very personal. The pauses and silences, the delicate mix of sounds as the musicians related to each other, all are critical to the appreciation of the music. I found each note as it was added to the sound. I felt like I was listening more carefully and felt more involved in the piece than when I listen to music where melodies are primary."

It takes a special kind of listening to appreciate the music of this century, not only for the audience but for the performers as well. Pitch, melody and rhythm may still be important, but composers are also turning their attention to other aspects of sound such as timbre, color, texture, resonance — and silence.

"There is a great deal of space in Takemitsu's music," said NPG director Matt Koczmieroski. "There isn't a sense that there has to be something happening all of the time. Individual sounds and notes are allowed to suspend themselves."

The musicians also need to listen in a different way to perform this music. In "Rainspell", although all of the notes are written, the timing is not specific. The New Performance Group, an ensemble of seven musicians, performs this piece without a conductor. They had to learn by constant playing and listening to know how long the spaces need to be. As



Koczmieroski explained, "It becomes a collaborative process. We become both performers and listeners. Timing becomes the personal part for the performer."

A piece that is vastly different from "Rainspell" is George Antheil's "Ballet Mechanique". Antheil felt that any sound-making device was fair game for him to use in composing. Originally composed for sixteen mechanical pianos, the piece is now performed by four pianos, glockenspiel, xylophone, timpani, a variety of percussion instruments, doorbells and recorded airplane sounds. When first performed in Paris, where Antheil wrote the piece in the early 1920's, "Ballet Mechanique" caused a riot, but its first performance at Cornish

College was a huge success.

"Sinister Resonance" will be broadcast during Cross Border Music, an ongoing program on KBCS that features a cross-cultural mix of 20th century music from the avant garde to the folk tradition, produced by Jon Gierlich and airing Mondays from 9:00 to 10:30 p.m.

"Sinister Resonance" was produced with support from the Seattle, King County, and Washington State Arts Commissions.

Broadcast Schedule

KBCS (91.3 FM), Mondays at 9:30 p.m.:

Nov. 19: Henry Cowell

Nov. 26: John Cage and George Antheil

Dec. 3: Boulez, Berio and Stockhausen

Dec. 10: Takemitsu and Ichihyanagi

Dec. 17: Morton Feldman and Janice Gitek

If you have comments or questions about "Sinister Resonance", please call or write Executive Producer Joan Rabinowitz, 4261 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle WA 98105-6999, (206) 634-0919.

Jack Straw Plans Radio Drama

"Margaret Jean, A Radio Portrait" will be Jack Straw Productions' first radio theater project to be produced at the new facility. JSP has received an award from the Seattle Arts Commission in partial support of this production. The history of the project is a story in itself.

Early this year Paula Swenson of Solstice Performance Arts asked Jack Straw Productions Executive Producer Joan Rabinowitz and playwright Jesse Minkert to look over a project for a radio play. Swenson had been working with a woman named Eleanor Anderson on a memorial project for Anderson's friend, the late Margaret

Jean Schuddakopf.

"As I read Eleanor's script," Minkert recalled, "I began to understand the admiration for Margaret Jean that drove Eleanor to tell her story. Margaret Jean was politically active from an early age. Her family had a farm in eastern Washington, was well educated, and held strong convictions about the folly of war and the value of human rights. Margaret Jean carried that tradition of political involvement through decade after decade of the Twentieth Century. She maintained it

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Margaret Jean Explores Life of Political Involvement

Drama, from previous page

all her life, at times in the face of intense harassment.

"I saw her story as an opportunity to look back over the political turmoil of this century in this part of the country, to evoke the flavor of those times and to recreate some of the places and events through radio theater. Her personal life offers a point of contact with larger events: two world wars,

the Depression, labor unrest and the Red Scare of the Fifties. These events become the context of her personal life."

New possibilities opened up when Minkert and Rabinowitz ran into former Jack Straw board member Libby Sinclair and briefed her on the story. Margaret Jean was subpoenaed by the House Unamerican Activities Committee, and testified in the Seattle hearings in 1954. Sinclair knew another witness at those hearings, George

Starkovich, who had spoken out boldly against the committee. Starkovich is still living in Seattle. Sinclair helped set up a meeting between him, Rabinowitz and Minkert, where they met Pearl Castle, who also had been at the 1954 hearings. Castle and Starkovich were gold mines of information about the history of the Left in Washington state.

This interview led Minkert to more research on the hearings, in order to recreate the sideshow atmosphere, the bullying methods of the committee, and the defiance of the witnesses, including Margaret Jean.

Anderson's original script was an epic work with thirteen episodes of varying lengths. Minkert's adaptation comprises two half-hour episodes. With a working script in hand, the production team of Rabinowitz, Minkert, Swenson and audio engineer Doug Haire can now begin to plan the production. After that, they can bring actors into the new studios at Jack Straw Productions and begin recording.

"Margaret Jean" will be broadcast on community and public radio stations in the Northwest beginning in the spring of 1991.

KSER Hires Public Affairs Director

Ed Bremer, a radio professional with 14 years' experience in public broadcasting, has joined the KSER staff as Public Affairs Director. Bremer started work at the Lynnwood studios on October 15.

Bremer worked until 1989 as the News/Public Affairs Director at KPBX-FM, the NPR affiliate in Spokane. He was instrumental in bringing volunteer commentators and news reporters into the KPBX schedule. "That was very important in his selection," says KSER manager Nancy Keith, "but we were also impressed with his journalistic standards and his ability to do tough, in-depth interviews."

During his 20-year career in broadcasting, Bremer started in commercial radio, but he found the in-depth approach to radio he admires when he worked at KPBS, the public radio outlet in San Diego. There he designed and produced a daily six-hour information program along with work in classical announcing and production engineering. He holds broadcasting awards from the Sigma Delta Chi journalism society and United Press International, among others.

Bremer moved to the Puget Sound area so that his wife Lucia could pursue her career in computer-aided design. During his spare time Bremer is taking pre-law courses at Edmonds Community College.

At KSER Ed Bremer begins his duties by recruiting and training thirty to fifty people for local public affairs programs — from commentaries to information magazine formats. He has introduced the phrase "user-friendly radio" based on a commitment to use the telephone as a two-way link between station and audience.

"I'm delighted to be here," says KSER's new Public Affairs Director, "and I really look forward to working in this community to create an opportunity for a wide-ranging exchange of ideas and opinions."

Jack Straw Engineer Missing

On June 28th Ron Putnam, Chief Engineer at Jack Straw, did not report for work at the Foundation. We were worried: Ron lived alone and was reliable about keeping us informed of any necessary absences. We contacted his relatives, who in turn called the police.

After an initial investigation the case was referred to the Homicide Division. The police have not located Putnam, but did find all of his personal effects and his home burglarized, his auto stolen, and savings and checking accounts removed by forgery. A suspect was taken in on related charges. The case remains pending until either Putnam is located or additional criminal evidence is un-

covered sufficient to file homicide charges.

Putnam joined the staff of the Foundation in March of 1988 as Chief Engineer to both the Seattle production facility and KSER-FM in Lynnwood. He played a major role in planning for tower, transmitter, and production and broadcast equipment for the two.

Radio engineering had been a lifelong love and vocation for Putnam. Before coming to Jack Straw he had been Chief Engineer at KYAC AM/FM.

For all of us who worked with Ron, his sad disappearance has left us with a deep sense of loss. We will miss him for years to come.

Donations Sought for Production Center, KSER

by Herb Levy

As you know from reading this newsletter, recent Jack Straw-produced programs have been heard on more than fifty non-commercial radio stations across the United States, our new production facility is now ready for your recording projects, and KSER, our first broadcast station in six years; will be on the air in January 1991. Of course, we could not have done any of this without your assistance, so thanks once again to all of the donors, volunteers, Board members and staff who helped make these facilities come to life. However, there are two things we still need to strengthen these important projects, and we need your help. For the Jack Straw Productions facility we need a piano, and for KSER we need a satellite down-link.

Studio One at Jack Straw Productions is too small for a full-size con-

cert grand, but the room sounds so good — I think the technical term is "sweet" — that it would be a shame not to put an upright piano there. With the help of some of the area's talented pianists we are looking for a good used baby grand piano. So that we can have a piano as needed, we will rent one until we can find the right one to buy. Your donations will enable us to make this purchase more quickly.

KSER has hired directors for music and public affairs, and volunteer training begins soon with wonderful and varied programs planned, but it will be difficult to provide eighteen hours a day of quality broadcasting unless we can also tap into nationally-distributed programming. Shows from National Public Radio, American Public Ra-

dio, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the British Broadcasting Corporation and independent productions are all available via the satellite broadcasting system. With a down-link KSER can be the source for public affairs and cultural programs not heard anywhere else in the Northwest.

The total cost for the baby grand piano and satellite down-link will be between twenty-five and thirty-five thousand dollars. Your tax-deductible donation to Jack Straw will help us to make these much-needed purchases for our two facilities, Jack Straw Productions and KSER-FM. Please take a moment now to fill out the coupon on the back page of this newsletter and return it with your donation today. Thank you for helping us to improve non-commercial radio in the Northwest.

November 1990 Vol. 7 / No. 3

"JSMF Public Radio News" (USPS 671-470) is published quarterly by the Jack Straw Foundation, 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98105-6999. Second-class postage paid at Seattle, WA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to JSMF Public Radio News, 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98105-6999.

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